Unit .24

Session .03

Jesus Walks on Water

Scripture

Matthew 14:22-36

22 Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. **23** After dismissing the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. Well into the night, he was there alone. **24** Meanwhile, the boat was already some distance from land, battered by the waves, because the wind was against them. **25** Jesus came toward them walking on the sea very early in the morning. **26** When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified. "It's a ghost!" they said, and they cried out in fear. **27** Immediately Jesus spoke to them. "Have courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." **28** "Lord, if it's you," Peter answered him, "command me to come to you on the water." **29** He said, "Come." And climbing out of the boat, Peter started walking on the water and came toward Jesus. **30** But when he saw the strength of the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me!" **31** Immediately Jesus reached out his hand, caught hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" **32** When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. **33** Then those in the boat worshiped him and said, "Truly you are the Son of God." **34** When they had crossed over, they came to shore at Gennesaret. **35** When the men of that place recognized him, they alerted the whole vicinity and brought to him all who were sick. **36** They begged him that they might only touch the end of his robe, and as many as touched it were healed.

Intro Options

Main Point:
Jesus is in control over all of life's storms.

Option 1

Break your students into groups of two or three. Pass out a sheet of paper to each group. Each group should now create a character who has recently done some action. They should use a few sentences to describe the person (age, gender, likes, dislikes, dress, etc.). They should then use two or three more sentences to describe what this person has done. It could be anything from stealing a piece of gum to throwing a winning pass at a football game to working hard at his or her job.

Collect all the sheets and then redistribute them to the groups; each group should have a new sheet of paper. They should now imagine that they are in charge of making a new reality show called Poetic Justice. They should propose a half-hour show for their person. In that episode, they should somehow see to it that the person receives the most just, fair consequence(s) of their action. Each group should either create a skit or some storyboards showing what would happen in their episodes. Let them prepare and then show their skits and storyboards.

After everyone has gone, ask them what episode they would make for the following person: Someone who claimed to be the Son of God and supported His claim by exercising authority over nature by controlling storms and seas. What would be the most fair consequence for this person and His actions? Point out to them it would be worship, as we'll see in today's lesson.

Option 2

Let your kids get into small groups to make skits. Here's their assignment: they are to imagine that they have found an old Bible. When they opened it up and traced their fingers along some of the lines to read, a genie popped out of the leaves. This is a special genie: she can only grant two wishes, not three; moreover, they are very specific wishes: the students can wish for two virtues to be imbued to all Christians or people. They should decide what two virtues they would choose and then create a skit showing what it might look like if everyone had those characteristics.

Ask students what they think the church would look like if everyone in it manifested courage and faith. If you have time, they can make skits showing as much. In today's lesson, we'll see that two characteristics Jesus calls for us to have in life's circumstances are faith and courage.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Matthew 14:22-24.

The scene began with Jesus sending His disciples away in a boat as He went to pray alone. In these verses, 22-24, we learn at least three things about the setting in which this miracle takes place. First, the passage tells us that the scene takes place well into the night. Most Bible scholars suggest sometime between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m. Second, while Matthew's rendition of the story doesn't include this detail, the Gospel of John informs us that the disciples traveled 3-4 miles during this time. Third, we know there was tumultuous weather during this boat ride (v. 24). With these three items, the stage is set for a remarkable scene.

As the disciples departed, Jesus was not in the boat with them. In verse 23, we see Jesus' motivation for retreating away from the crowd was to get alone with God the Father and pray. Jesus, being fully human, needed time to rest and recuperate. It's amazing how He found retreat, refreshment, and rejuvenation by spending time alone with God the Father.

- **What benefits have you experienced from spending time alone praying to God?**

This took place in the evening, and the disciples were out in open water (vv. 24-25). While Jesus was with the Father enjoying time for rejuvenation, the world kept turning, and His disciples found themselves in the midst of a storm. In other words, Jesus was in prayer when the disciples began struggling to navigate their course during a violent storm.

During difficult times in our lives, we may be tempted to wonder if God has forgotten about us or even doubt that He loves us. Mark's Gospel account of the storm battering the disciples mentioned that Jesus saw how the wind was working against them and they were struggling (Mark 6:48). Jesus did not deliver them immediately, but He saw them, and He came to them walking on the waves.

- **When have you had to endure a struggle in your life that God did not immediately resolve? How were you challenged to grow in your faith through that struggle?**

Read Matthew 14:25-31.

Just imagine how truly terrifying this scene must have been. The disciples had been alone for hours, the weather and waves were battering their boat, and then off in the distance, they saw what they thought might be a ghost approaching them. The scenario was cause for panic. Yet, in contrast to the chaos of the moment, Jesus was calm. The waves were likely still tumultuous since the passage doesn't say the winds ceased until verse 32; yet Jesus walked on the surface of the raging waters.

The reality behind the waves and the breakers is that they belonged to Jesus. In His divinity, He knew the number of drops under His feet and the names of the creatures swimming underneath His heels. In His humanity, He had enough faith that the Father by the power of the Spirit would keep Him afloat as He approached the boat. Jesus' command over every drop of water showed that He truly is sovereign over all of life.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
Jesus is in control over all of life's storms.

Matthew 14

23. Twice in Matthew 14, once in verse 13 and now in verse 23, we see Jesus retreating from the crowds to pray in isolation. There is much we can learn from this pattern in Jesus' life. First, if our goal is to look and act like Jesus, spending time in solitude with the Father in prayer must be a priority in our lives. Jesus did it, and we must as well. While our union with Christ cannot be shaken or taken away from us, our communion with Christ waxes and wanes. If we want to commune with the Lord, we must spend time with Him. Second, the Christian life is to be lived both in crowds and alone. Neither the introvert nor the extrovert can claim that their personality is better suited for Christianity. The reality is this: God redeems all kinds of people and our personality quirks are never excuses for disobedience in living a life modeled after Jesus.

For many Christians, prayer can be difficult. We lack diligence to pray consistently, our minds wonder during prayer, we're not sure exactly what to pray, we feel too embarrassed or dirty to talk to a holy God, our schedules are too busy, and so forth. There are a number of reasons we excuse ourselves from the life giving exercise of talking with our God. This is not good for our souls. We are dependent creatures who need the Lord. Prayer is nothing less than a confession of our neediness. When we pray and seek the Lord we recognize Him as the giver and sustainer of life.

In addition, it is also important to note that the Christian life is to be lived both in crowds and alone. The extrovert may boast in her natural ability to work over crowds, talk to others in evangelism, or be with the masses as Jesus was much of the time. On the other hand, the introvert may boast of his ability to sit quietly at the feet of Jesus, pursue isolated contemplation about the goodness of God, or remain in silence alone with God like Jesus did in parts of this passage. However, God redeems both sinful extroverts and sinful introverts and uses their gifts accordingly for His kingdom purposes.

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 96, DDG)

God is Omnipotent

God is all-powerful: there is nothing God cannot do so long as it does not contradict His own nature or law. God has power and authority over the universe He created, from the largest solar system to the smallest particle. Affirming that God is all-powerful does not mean that God can sin—since that would go against His perfect moral nature. As Christians, we rest in the belief that the God who has all power is good, and we gain great comfort by knowing that an all-powerful God is working for our good and joy.

TEACHING PLAN

- **How is the sovereignty of God a comfort to you as a Christian?**

According to the Bible, there is no question that God sovereignly ordains trials in our lives at various points in order to reveal His character and nature to us in ways that we would never know apart from the storm (Rom. 8:28-30; Jas. 1:1-4; 1 Pet. 4:12-16). And it is in the middle of the storm that the presence of Christ becomes all the more real. Because Jesus is the great "I AM" and He is with us always, we can have courage and faith in the midst of our storms. But what if our faith falters?

In this passage, when Jesus walks on the water it is without doubt miraculous and marvelous; however, it should not surprise us. The Gospel narratives are filled with miracle after miracle performed by the wonder-working Son of God. What is surprising is when Peter takes a step out of the boat and begins walking on water himself. Already standing miraculously on the surface of the water, Peter made one wrong and then one right move. His error came as his eyes took notice of the strength of the wind and waves (v. 30). The wind gusts made him question his venture toward Jesus. The strength of the wind assaulted his assurance and like an anvil doubt made him sink. Peter's mistake was taking his eyes off of Jesus and placing them on his obstacles. He had greater faith that his obstacle would overtake him than his Savior would secure him. This doubt lead Jesus to address Peter's doubt in the end. But also notice what Peter did right. In a moment of complete despair and fearfulness, Peter did the right thing by calling for Jesus.

- **In moments of trial or tragedy, to what or whom are you tempted to turn for help or security instead of Jesus?**

Read Matthew 14:32-36.

Although Jesus' calming of the storm was a display of His supernatural power over creation, the key factor to this passage is found in verse 33 when the disciples worshiped Jesus. At that moment, the disciples confessed that Jesus is truly the Son of God. Their worship of Jesus, who was standing right before them, shows that they were fully convinced of His divine identity. The same can probably be said of us, that our worship of the Lord becomes more meaningful and sincere after we have seen Him do great work in our lives. Reflecting on Jesus being sovereign over our circumstances as well as our supplier of courage will allow our hearts to have an attitude of worship rather than worry.

Once they made it to shore, all of the sick in the region of Gennesaret were brought to Jesus, for they knew that He had the power to heal. Not only did He have the power to heal, but also just touching the end of His clothing was enough for the chronically ill to find healing and rest.

Notice that when the men of Gennesaret saw the power of Jesus, keeping it to themselves was not an option; they had to tell others. Once we've caught a vision for the beauty and glory of Jesus, we too find that the news is just too good not to share.

- **Why does the recognition of our own spiritual sickness and our need for Jesus compel us to tell others about Him?**

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
Jesus is in control over all of life's storms.

Matthew 14

28-31. Jesus heard Peter's request and told him to come out and meet Him in the middle of the water! This must have been amazing for all of the disciples to witness. Remember, Jesus had not yet calmed the storm, so the winds were still raging and the water was still churning. And still, Peter obeyed Jesus by going to Him. However, on the water Peter began to focus on the strength of the wind, and his courage retreated. He once again embraced fear and lost his focus on Jesus.

As soon as Peter cried out to Jesus to save him, Jesus did just that. Jesus then exposed Peter's lack of faith and asked him why he doubted. Little faith? From our vantage point, it probably seems that Peter had a pretty great amount of faith because he was willing to step out of the boat, yet Jesus said Peter had little faith. Jesus' rebuke meant Peter's faith was weak and needed to be strengthened. This only comes with having greater dependency on Jesus.

32-36. A mistake often made with studying the Bible is reading the story as an isolated event or as merely a moralistic story that has little to do with what comes before or after. For instance, with our passage for this session, it would be easy to read the story as a scene showcasing the consequence of doubt and a moral lesson for us to exercise faith. While the passage does teach us to exercise faith, it is also more than that; it is going somewhere. The passage reaches a climax in these five verses.

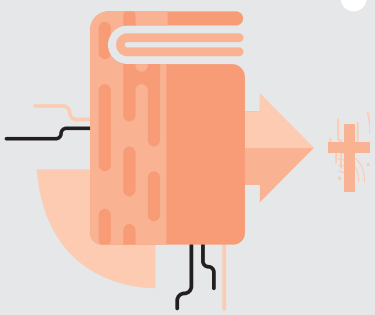
Activity

As a large group, brainstorm some difficult life circumstances people might encounter, especially at your students' age. They could be big or small: family issues, a game that didn't save your progress, a shortage of money, a difficult test coming up. List them out on a white board.

Ask students to get into groups to make skits. Assign each group a random situation from the list you made. Have your groups make a skit showing what it might look like to handle those circumstances with courage and faith: courage that Jesus will work through this difficulty, and faith that Jesus is working for their good somehow. Emphasize the importance of showing a good attitude as you "walk on the water" of these circumstances; students might be tempted to make a skit where Jesus somehow heals all the problems or the problems miraculously get solved. While He sometimes works this way, we want to focus as Christians more on our attitudes and trusting in Jesus than in looking for Him to alleviate our circumstances.

(p. 98, DDG) Christ Connection

Jesus demonstrated that He has sovereign power over nature by walking on water and calming the storm. Through His miracles, teaching, and most clearly His death and resurrection, Jesus proved Himself to be worthy of our faith and worship. He alone is able to save.



JESUS WALKS ON WATER

Matthew 14:22–36

JESUS WALKS ON WATER

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JESUS CONNECTION

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LIFEWISE QUALITY

COURAGE – Boldly doing the right thing, even in difficult circumstances.

HEAD

What did Jesus show that He had power over?

How was Peter able to walk on the water? Why did he begin to sink?

HEART

Jesus was with Peter on the waves, but when Peter took his eyes off Jesus, he began to doubt Jesus' ability to steady him through the storm. When great difficulties come, what are you tempted to focus on instead of Jesus? Why do you think that is?

Courage comes with greater dependence on God. When we put our focus on God in the midst of a difficult problem and trust God to handle it, God will give us the courage to do what is right. Think of a difficult situation you have experienced or are going through right now. How could you show that you trust God to handle it? How can you step out courageously, doing what is right in the middle of this situation?

HANDS

Think of an area of your life where you could use more courage: standing up for yourself or a friend, giving a speech or playing a solo, refusing to give into peer pressure, telling a family member about Jesus, walking through an illness yourself or with a loved one, etc. Read the verses on courage below and pick one to memorize. Write it on a piece of paper where you will see it. Take time to read through it every day this week. Then, choose to take a step in courage and do that thing you have been too afraid to do.

- Isaiah 41:10 – Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will hold on to you with My righteous right hand.
- Psalm 27:1 – The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom should I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—whom should I dread?
- 2 Timothy 1:7 – For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but one of power, love and sound judgment.